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SUBJECT: SADR CITY COUNCIL MEMBER COMPLAINS ABOUT GROWING STRENGTH OF JAM

Classified By: PolCouns Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary. In a September 26 meeting, Baghdad's Sadr City District Advisory Council (DAC) member Dr. Haider Jabr Zedan told EmbOffs that he was facing increasing pressure to become a member of the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM). Having refused several overtures, Dr. Haider claimed that he had received thinly-veiled threats from other JAM members, including the current Sadr City DAC chair. Dr. Haider reported that JAM had begun to publicly execute supposed Sunni terrorists, which, while helping Shia families of victims reach resolution, also instilled fear and compliance in the community. Dr. Haider, who says he attended school with some of JAM's current leadership, explained that the Sadr City branch is comprised of 5 branches, four civilian and one military. He bemoaned the organization's superior recruiting and media tactics, which had led to its growth in other areas in Baghdad, particularly in the Kadamiya district. End Summary.

PRESSURE IS ON TO JOIN

¶12. (C) In a meeting September 26, Sadr City District Advisory Council member Dr. Haider (Independent) told EmbOffs that over the past few weeks, JAM leadership had approached him numerous times to join the organization. He believed that his refusal to join was the reason behind several threats he recently received, including one from JAM member and Sadr City DAC chair, Abdulhasan Jabara. In this particular threat, the DAC chair warned Dr. Haider that rumors had spread within JAM that Dr. Haider was performing poorly as a DAC member. Jabara continued by saying that to redeem himself, Dr. Haider must request a letter from the JAM commander in the sector in which he lives saying that in fact Dr. Haider's work is acceptable. Dr. Haider, noting that to do so would put him on even weaker ground, said he has refused to follow through with this request.

PUBLIC EXECUTIONS SCARY BUT GIVE RESIDENTS SENSE OF JUSTICE

¶13. (C) Dr. Haider asserted that JAM dominance of Sadr City was growing in part because JAM provided Shia residents with a sense of justice that government officials could not provide. He claimed that anytime a car bomb or a suicide attacker killed Shia, the JAM specifically went into Sunni neighborhoods to kidnap and execute equal numbers of Sunnis as Shia killed, in some cases with help from Jaysh al-Mehdi members who occupy lower level positions in the police. He also claimed that the JAM occasionally conducted public executions. As a recent example, he alleged that on

September 25, JAM members brought an Sunni woman (who happened to be Egyptian) to the same area in which over 30 Sadr City women were killed while waiting in line for cooking gas September 24. The Egyptian woman was beaten and stoned to death in public view of residents.

Sadr City's Jaysh Al-Mahdi Organizational Chart

¶4. (C) Dr. Haider, who claims to have attended school with some of the prominent members of the Sadr City's JAM organization, indicated that that it is composed of 5 branches, one military and four civilian. The civilian side, which is formally known as Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) is broken into the media branch, led by Abdul Hadi al Derraji, the Society branch, led by Hazim al-Araji, brother of Council of Representatives member Baha al-Araji, the Culture branch led by Sheikh Jasim, and finally the courts/punishment branch which is run by Ibrahim al Jaberri.

5 (C) Though Dr. Haider could not provide detailed information on the Court/Punishment section, he did indicate that judges for JAM sharia courts were often recruited from the local population of tribal sheikhs, who also had membership in JAM. The military branch, which Dr. Haider says is broken up into 114 brigades of varying numbers, is commanded by Hasan Karim, otherwise known as Abu Dera. Each segment of Sadr City reportedly has its own command structure that reports to Hasan Karim.

¶6. (C) When discussing the court structure employed by JAM, Dr. Haider relayed a story about a DAC colleague who was detained by JAM and shepherded through its extrajudicial

BAGHDAD 00003698 002 OF 002

court system. The DAC member was detained on suspicions that he was urging Coalition Forces to raid the homes of JAM members. Dr. Haider said that he and another DAC member went to the JAM leadership to plead for the detainee's release. Taking this into consideration, the Sadr City JAM court system decided to elevate the case and transported the individual to the JAM court in Najaf for further deliberation.

PR WORK and RECRUITING IS IMPORTANT

¶7. (C) Part of the JAM's tactics, according to Dr. Haider, was to claim credit for any public works projects that may have been carried out by the Iraqi or U.S. government. He said signs stating that the provincial council had funded a specific project were often taken down by JAM media branch members who would then put up a sign indicating that OMS (Office of the Martyr Sadr) had paid for the project. Dr. Haider told a specific story in which he himself had worked to bring kerosene to the DAC to give out to needy residents. Before he could distribute the kerosene, JAM members approached him and suggested that they distribute the kerosene so that he could attend to "more important work."

¶8. (C) Dr. Haider opined that JAM membership was alluring because it conferred a certain level of authority and opportunity to those who otherwise would have no mobility in Iraqi society, in many cases trumping the traditional tribal system. In other cases, people joined JAM so that they could receive employment, for example within the Ministry of Health, or as bodyguards to Sadrists politicians. He pointed to certain prominent members of Baghdad government as important figures in the JAM organization including Sadr City DAC chairman AbdulHasan Jabara, Vice Chairman of Baghdad Provincial Council Muhan al-Sa'adi, Deputy to the Mayor, Na'em Abob, and head of Baghdad municipal services Kamel Al-Zaidi

¶9. (C) Dr. Haider explained that JAM was spreading out into other areas of Baghdad as it slowly but surely recruits members from each district, and has developed recruits in the neighborhoods of Hurria and Qadamiya within the Qadamiya district (Note: a local hire who lives in Qadamiya has reported the increased prevalence of JAM members in her area over the past couple of months). In other areas, he said, Badr corps continues to dominate. For example, Karada neighborhood in Karada district is still largely represented by Badr Corps members (Note: this is consistent with what a local hire who lives in Karada district has reported over the past few weeks).

COMMENT

¶10. (C) Dr. Haider is long-standing Embassy contact who has provided reliable information in the past. Like any other resident of Sadr City, he is privy to the public going-ons of Jaysh-al Mehdi that others in Baghdad would not be aware of. He lives with the JAM in his everyday life as well as in his work as a DAC member. He spends his nights as an emergency room doctor at a local hospital, which perhaps contributes to his distaste of the organization and its practices. As the JAM grows, it becomes an outlet to those who have limited choices, and are eager to join for the sake of revenge, for employment and stature, or simply because of intimidation.

KHALILZAD